



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Headquarters

Jean Lafitte National
Historical Park and
Preserve.

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Chalmette Battlefield Task Force Minutes

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting March 26, 6:00 p.m.
Location: Council Chambers Meeting Room
St. Bernard Parish Government Complex
8245 W. Judge Perez Dr.
Chalmette, Louisiana

Present:

Mrs. George W. Davis
Mr. Anthony Fernandez, Jr.
Mr. Alvin W. Guillot
Mr. Drew Heaphy, CPA
Mrs. Elizabeth McDougall, *Chairperson*
Ms. Faith Moran
Col. John F. Pugh, Jr.
Ms. Geraldine Smith
Mr. Tim Bemisderfer, *Federal Designated Officer for
Regional Director, Southeast Regional Office*

Absent:

Mr. Eric Cager
Capt. Bonnie Pepper Cook
Mr. Paul V. Perez, CFP
Mr. Michael L. Fraering

Chairperson Elizabeth McDougall opened the meeting. She introduced a report prepared by a sub-committee of the Task Force. The report was based upon information gathered from members of the battlefield community and citizen's groups.

Col. Pugh introduced a motion to formally present the Fact Finding Report to the Task Force; Ms. Moran seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

The report was read to the task force by several members in turn. General discussion of each point ensued. A copy of the report is appended to the minutes.

It was agreed that the Task Force should hold its next meeting in May on site at the Chalmette Battlefield and Cemetery so that park staff could be made available to the Task Force to address some of the concerns raised in the sub-committee report.

A discussion with park staff about some of the inherent problems of physically managing the battlefield took place. Topics discussed included the condition of the battlefield at the time of the

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battle; the challenges faced by managers in trying to arrest the battlefield's plant community in a fixed successional state; the drainage problems caused by subsidence, increased run-off from rounding development, and the blockages caused by the railroad and highway; the need to balance the esthetics of vegetational screening with historical accuracy, and other issues.

The condition of the cemetery and the headstones was discussed. It was pointed out that three-fifths of each headstones was below ground, making straightening them in the heaving alluvial soils quite expensive and labor intensive. The soft marble headstones impose limitations on simple cleaning methods, such as pressure washing. The Task Force was told that a "Condition Assessment" of the cemetery was in progress. This assessment will provide the first step in developing a viable treatment plan for the headstones and the failing wall. Development of such a plan with detailed costs estimates is a pre-requisite for obtaining NPS funding in the future.

Mr. Gulliot asked about the budget process and how funding for operation and maintenance was allocated among the various sites. Supt. Smith stated that a report of the parks budget would be prepared for the Task Force to review. The Superintendent explained that her office had the ultimate and responsibility for budget allocation. At Jean Lafitte, the annual budget is formulated by the Management Team, consisting of the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Acadian unit manager, and the chiefs of the branches of Administration, Facility Management, Resource Education, and resource Management.

Deputy Superintendent Herrera discussed the many variables that are analyzed when allocating budget and staffing. He pointed out that, as an example, a full-time maintenance position was just moved from the Barataria to Chalmette.

Methods for assisting the park by outside groups and volunteers were discussed. Col. Pugh mentioned that the National Guard does provide support for civic projects and that there is a possibility that they could provide some heavy equipment work to the battlefield. A clean up day could be considered for the cemetery and that prisoners, civic clubs, and the National Guard could all be possible sources of labor. Supt. Smith mentioned that Frank Mobley, the Chalmette maintenance foreman, is talking with the St. Bernard Sheriff's department.

It was pointed out that two Chalmette staff are scheduled to attend a NPS historic preservation work shop next month to learn the most up to date techniques for cleaning and preserving headstones.

Mr. Hyland, St Bernard Parish Historian, mentioned a 1980's report on the maintaining the Chalmette Monument, and suggested that it might be helpful to the park.

Past use of the St. Bernard Parish fire truck for the removal of the vegetation on the monument was discussed. One problem noted by park staff was that while simply pulling the vegetation from the cracks solved the immediate visual problem, doing so often resulted in significant deterioration of the masonry. The monument is now in need of a major re-pointing.

Task force members suggested that within the local community several companies might be prevailed upon for assistance with specific projects.

Mr. Fernandez noted that the final concluding paragraph of the fact finding report summarized the desire of the Task Force sub-committee to have the Chalmette Battlefield reestablished as an independent National Park, as it was before establishment of Jean Lafitte in 1978. Superintendent

Smith discussed the process by which this might be done, noting that the power to create units of the national park system does not reside within the National Park Service. Re-establishment of Chalmette as an independent unit could only be done by an act of Congress.

D. Muth reviewed the process for obtaining funding under the present federal system of appropriations, noting the importance within the NPS of the development of the GMP for Chalmette. A follow up discussion resulted on the mission of the park and the mission of the Task Force and how it could help facilitate the planning process.

Mr. Gulliot discussed his desire to open a view from the St. Bernard highway into the battlefield. It was pointed out that much of the property between the battlefield and the highway is owned by the railroad, not the park service. It was also pointed out that the vegetative screen was deliberately allowed to grow in order to buffer visitors on the battlefield from the noise, sights, and distractions of the busy highway, commercial operations, and railroad. It was pointed out that the GMP process was the place where options for achieving better views into the battlefield should be discussed.

Supt. Smith stated that she would like to review the Fact Finding Report and report back to the Task Force at the next meeting.

Mr. Heaphy requested that the maintenance supervisor be available for the site visit at the battlefield.

There was a discussion of past uses of the Malus-Beauregard house as an interpretive and administrative center.

Chairperson McDougall made a closing statement that there seemed to be agreement on the great need for extra funding for basic problems such as drainage and maintenance at the battlefield. She stated that the task force and the community have significant rapport with their congressional delegation. They would work hard to secure funding for the needs of the battlefield and cemetery but she was concerned that having the funds diffused through the Jean Lafitte budget might result in a significant loss of resources for the Chalmette unit. She repeated that in the opinion of the sub-committee there is a need to have the Chalmette unit as a stand-alone entity which would therefore receive ample funding for its many needs.

A discussion followed about how congressional funding is dispersed and the fact that line item funds can only be used for the designated purposes as indicated in the congressional legislation; for example construction funds can not be diverted for maintenance or operation needs.

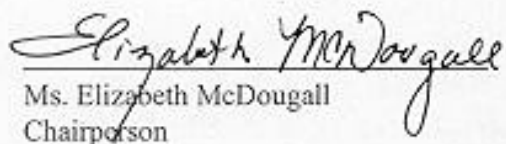
Ms. Davis mentioned that the original key to the monument would be presented to the park at the next DAR meeting and invited the Superintendent to attend and accept it.

Tim Bemisderfer, Federal Designated Officer, discussed several ideas from previous planning documents. He mentioned that there is a great amount of creative energy present in these ideas and in the present task force. He suggested that members of the task force consider and submit to him their vision for the battleground and cemetery. He suggested that they consider management issues and prioritize them, with the visitor experience in mind. He proposed to have the planning team attend the next meeting and meet the Task Force members.

The motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Gulliot and seconded by Ms Moran. The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Attachment 1: Fact Finding Report

Attachment 2: 1960-1995 General Concept Plans


Ms. Elizabeth McDougall
Chairperson

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Tim Bemisderfer
Federal Designated Officer